

Friends Forward



Fall 2009

National Wildlife Refuge System
www.fws.gov/refuges

From the Chief Talk to – and Become – the Media



Greg Siekaniec

Reporters can be tough as nails – except when they learn about a national wildlife refuge from Friends who love them.

I saw an editorial from the *Shreveport*

Times about Red River National Wildlife Refuge in Louisiana: “A short drive through a Bossier City neighborhood will deposit you in the middle of 650 acres of forest, filled with birds, wildlife and native plants. The Red River Wildlife Refuge is more than protected land getting in the way of the Arthur Ray Teague Parkway extension. We often talk about how beautiful northwest Louisiana can be. The refuge tries to preserve that beauty as closely as possible to its original state.”

The occasion for the editorial was the refuge’s fifth annual celebration of Refuge Week – and the Friends were active participants in rolling out the “green carpet to introduce the treasures of the refuge,” as the newspaper said.

There’s a straightforward message here: When Friends talk to the media, we get results. A Friends group brings a special voice – and community credibility – to working with the media. But media are changing. Since January 2008, at least 120 newspapers in the United States have shut

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Strategic Habitat Conservation



Steve Hillebrand

National wildlife refuges are using a tool called Strategic Habitat Conservation to look more broadly at wildlife habitat.

By Jennifer Anderson

Facing the need to plan for accelerating climate change that could well alter entire ecosystems, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is embracing a new concept – Strategic Habitat Conservation – to help species survive an uncertain 21st century.

Changing temperatures will alter the future for wildlife and wild lands. Development encroachment continues to destroy habitat. Exotic species are growing more plentiful.

“Clearly, our profession is struggling to keep pace with these challenges,” said Kathryn Owens, deputy manager at Virginia’s Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge, describing “a miasma of urban growth, climate change and other human influences.”

The Service’s response to these changes is Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC) – what Owens described as “a thoughtful and deliberate approach to conserving the species that have been placed in our trust and the habitats that sustain them.”

Under SHC, old ways of managing species are being updated. National wildlife refuges monitoring waterfowl and shorebird populations are beginning to do more than study a single location. Refuges are looking at how to work yet more closely with partners, strategically using funding resources by taking a broad view of habitat requirements and limitations and working yet more collaboratively.

Strategic Habitat Conservation includes four elements:

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Inventory and Monitoring: Counting on Success

J/K Hollingsworth




Citizens may be able to participate in some inventory and monitoring tasks like these volunteers studying a pygmy rattlesnake at Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge, FL.

coordinates monitoring efforts system-wide and ensures that information is easily available and informs management decisions at all levels – that’s our goal.”

Ecoregional Monitoring

Alaska has taken the lead in reevaluating how data are analyzed and reported. In April, the state’s Division of Realty and Natural Resources joined USGS Alaska in sponsoring a three-day forum attended by government land managers, biologists and other scientists, and leaders of key nonprofit organizations. The discussions focused on ecoregional monitoring.

Rather than focusing on specific refuges, participants divided Alaska into four ecoregions: polar, maritime, boreal and coastal boreal, each with geographically distinct species and environmental conditions. Participants created conceptual models to help biologists visualize the links that matter to fish and wildlife as permafrost melts, wetlands dry up and land erodes. The models allowed biologists to think in new ways about monitoring efforts and identifying data gaps or possibilities for partnerships.

The Alaska experience and other federal monitoring systems will help inform the development of an I&M program within the Refuge System. “It has to be relevant at the refuge level and within an ecoregion, or landscape conservation region,” insisted Loranger. “At the same time, we need to look at inventory and monitoring in the context of climate change and identify the most important information that could help reduce uncertainty. This requires a lot of thought.” 

“Inventory and monitoring” – you’ll be hearing a lot about it as refuge managers and partners implement Strategic Habitat Conservation. Inventory and monitoring (I&M) is critical to achieving strategic conservation goals.

In the face of accelerating climate change, the importance of a consistent, sophisticated and efficient system of inventory and monitoring can’t be overemphasized. An eight-member team of refuge biologists and data managers – the core Refuge System I&M team – will develop priorities for gathering baseline information, make recommendations on how to administer a national data program and identify what technology is needed to make it all happen. “We

need to broaden our thinking to include how monitoring on refuges can inform landscape level conservation,” said Andy Loranger, chief of the Refuge System Division of Natural Resources and Conservation Planning.

“Data management is key. The information we collect must be easily available to refuge managers, decision-makers and the public,” Loranger continued. “We must also ensure the long-term integrity of that data.”

How will this change what happens on an individual refuge? “A lot of work on refuges won’t change,” said Loranger. “How we manage data and its transparency – that will change. An I&M program that generates key layers of baseline data,

Hands-off Hiring

By Jennifer Anderson

At St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge in Florida, the need for an environmental education specialist was there, but the funding was not.

The Friends agreed to help, and in August 2007 they arranged to pay the salary for a staff member to shift duties to environmental education specialist.

Funding for educational outreach programs also is scarce at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge in Washington, where the Friends group makes it possible for an AmeriCorps volunteer to work on the refuge.

The arrangements at St. Marks and Turnbull Refuges are examples of how Friends groups are contributing valuable resources to refuges that otherwise would have to eliminate or forego plans for public outreach. Friends and staff members at both Turnbull and St. Marks say the arrangements work because of the caliber of the employees and the Friends' desire to leave the day-to-day management to the refuge manager.

"It's been a wonderful thing for us," said Terry Peacock, deputy manager of St. Marks Refuge, "but if the Friends had hired someone without Lori Nicholson's drive and initiative, it might have been a different story," she said. Nicholson, who holds degrees in both elementary education and wildlife and fisheries ecology, started part-time as a toll-booth ranger and said she was thrilled by the opportunity to work with students.

"We had plenty of money to cover it, and everyone wanted to go ahead with it," said Barney Parker, a member of the Friends board at the time.

Friendly and Casual Language

Nicholson, treasurer of the Friends group, and Robin Will, supervisory refuge ranger, signed a two-page letter of understanding, which detailed the arrangement in language that Will



Lori Nicholson (right) was hired as a part-time environmental educator by the Friends of St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge in Florida; later Nicholson was hired full time by the refuge.

described as "friendly and casual." Will sent Nicholson's hours to the Friends, which then sent a paycheck. The Friends group also paid for supplies and assisted with field-trip funding. "The [Friends group] was not interested in being her supervisor, and that was clearly spelled out in the paperwork we all signed," she said.

Through the arrangement, the refuge not only experienced a 48 percent increase in student participation in just one year but also, by the next fall, was able to staff the position itself.


"Since the Friends hired her initially," explained Will, "we were able to gather 12 months of data and take our request for a full-time position to our regional office."

Holding a Program Together

At Turnbull Refuge, the Friends group contributes \$5,000 a year, which is combined with funding from the state of Washington. AmeriCorps then uses the funds to pay its volunteer a stipend to work 10-and-a-half months a year as an environmental education specialist, explained Sandy Rancourt, visitor services manager.

"The Friends' participation has really helped hold the program together," Rancourt said. The Friends group also pays for a Student Conservation Association volunteer to work on the refuge for 12 weeks in the spring, also in environmental education.

Combined, the volunteers make it possible for the refuge to host as many as 6,000 to 7,000 students a year, more than double the number the refuge could handle otherwise, Rancourt said. Rancourt and Turnbull Manager Nancy Curry lauded the arrangement with Friends as a great way for refuges to fill positions that otherwise would go unfunded.

Friends President Joanne Powell said the Friends group maintains a hands-off approach to the daily supervision of the volunteers. "We don't think of the volunteers as being Friends employees, ever," Powell said. "We just donate the money so Turnbull can have these positions." An annual auction raises the bulk of the funding for the volunteers and also helps pay for supplies. 



from friend to friend

share your
success
stories

MONTANA

Come Inside

By James D. Hamilton

Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge provides habitat for migratory birds, mammals and a host of other species, and attracts about 150,000 visitors annually. Environmental education programs take place throughout the year, through coordination with refuge staff and the Friends of Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge.

Just one thing was missing: an outdoor education shelter to use during Montana's less hospitable weather.

And so last June, construction began, with the help of a local "green" builder, Birch Creek Design in Stevensville, MT.

The contractor used dead cottonwood trees from an area north of the refuge. The firm obtained larch beams and rafters from a timber fire-salvage sale.


The result: a 20-by-40-foot cement slab protected by a tin roof and surrounded by birch and cottonwood timbers, offering a panoramic view of the Bitterroot Mountains. The structure is located within the footprint of the refuge headquarters, so its regular use does not disturb fragile habitat.

The \$14,600 cost was partially funded by two grants, with the remaining \$6,600 donated by the Friends group, which also assisted in all phases of the undertaking: design, pouring the foundation and construction. The shelter was inaugurated in late June with the refuge's BioBlitz, when it was used by professors

from the University of Montana and area naturalists.

Some 2,000 students from the Bitterroot and Missoula Valleys are expected to use the shelter each year. Additionally, the refuge hosts lectures by groups such as the Bitterroot Audubon Society, Montana Natural History Center and the University of Montana Biology Department.

Articles in local newspapers, the *Bitterroot Star* and *Ravalli Republic*, demonstrate just what the structure will mean to the community and Lee Metcalf Refuge.

James Hamilton is vice president of the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge Friends group. 

TEXAS

Off-Season Strategies

Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge is famous for its songbirds, especially the endangered golden-cheeked warbler and black-capped vireo. Each spring, the refuge's Friends group pulls out all the stops, celebrating with a four-day festival that attracts upwards of 500 people.

Then there's the group's other, lesser-known bird fest, held in the dead of winter and devoted to . . . the sparrow.

That's right, those nondescript little brown jobs – LBJs, in birding parlance. Thanks to its strategic location on the edge of the Edwards Plateau, Balcones Canyonlands Refuge is a real sparrow hot spot, with at least two dozen species taking up residence in and around the refuge each winter. And that, apparently, is music to the ears of intermediate and advanced birders who have graduated beyond the basics of bird identification and are looking for a new challenge.

Hence, the Sparrow Fest. Each winter, says Friends board member Cathy




Friends of Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge, MT, helped build an outdoor education shelter that will serve some 2,000 students each year.

Harrington, birders flock to the refuge to take part in a full day of lectures, classroom activities and hikes celebrating the humble sparrow. The program always sells out, with registration cut off after 30 or 35 applicants. With breakfast and lunch, the cost is \$40 for Friends members and \$75 for the general public; prospective members get a \$10 discount. An optional dinner costs another \$15. In 2010, the event is set for Feb. 6.

The event is a great way to get people onto the refuge in the winter, said staff biologist and self-professed sparrow nut Chuck Sexton, who leads the workshops along with Audubon Society experts Byron Stone and Bill Reiner. "We have varieties of sparrows from all over North America that either reside or winter here," Sexton said. "It's exceeded only by a few spots in southeast Arizona in the winter." None of the wintering sparrows is endangered, he said, but the Le Conte's sparrow, a grasslands bird from the Northern Great Plains, is "getting pretty sparse."

"Sparrows are so challenging," said Byron Stone. "They all look alike. It's frustrating for beginning and intermediate birders." So he and his colleagues orient the group with lectures and slide shows before observing them. "We go beyond the simple field marks and emphasize things like behavior," Sexton said.

New birders can be surprised at the birds' subtle differences, Sexton said. "Sparrows really are quite diverse in their plumage. They open your eyes to the beauty of the subtle plumage differences in birds."

Still, it's the challenge of identifying them that gets everyone going. "That's what drew me," Sexton said. "I love sparrows, and I just love chasing these LBJs." 

FLORIDA

Beyond the Newsletter

Monthly or quarterly newsletters are all well and good for getting the news out, but what if you want to reach your members with updates and other tidbits on a weekly or even daily basis? Consider the e-mail bulletin.



Chelle Koster Walton is the editor of *Society Pages*, the quarterly newsletter of "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society. Two years ago, she began experimenting with sending e-bulletins to her newsletter subscribers, as well as visitors to the refuge, donors and anyone else who expressed an interest. The result: "Ding on the Wing," an occasional mass e-mailing that hits 1,100 in-boxes anywhere from once or twice a week to daily.


The publishing schedule depends entirely upon what's going on, Walton said. She sends out bulletins to note everything from staff news and bookstore buys to rare refuge sightings, upcoming events and request for docents. "It's a good way to recycle whatever I've sent out in press releases or the newsletter," Walton said. "It's a very simple way to communicate with everybody."

The group manages its subscriber list through Constant Contact, a Massachusetts company experienced in helping nonprofits and other small organizations connect with their members. Everyone who receives the e-mails must "opt in"—that is, elect to receive the e-mail—and it's simple for

recipients to unsubscribe. Walton offers two tips for e-bulletin writers:

- Keep it short. E-bulletins are supposed to be read and deleted in short order. Stick to one item per e-mail.
- Mix it up. Instead of being entirely practical and promotional, Walton likes to intersperse newsy e-mails with ones containing stunning close-up photographs of refuge flora and fauna. "We get

responses every time we send those out," Walton said. "People forward them to their friends, ask us for high-resolution copies and tell us we've made their day. I think the word is getting out."

To receive "Ding on the Wing" e-mail bulletins, sign up at www.dingdarlingsociety.org. To see archived copies, click on "Ding on the Wing Bulletins" from the menu in the upper right-hand corner. 

Pass the News Around

Friends Forward is available online so pass the word to everyone in your Friends organization and to prospective members. Printed copies are mailed to Friends organizations and refuge staff. If you would like to receive printed copies, send an email to Martha_Nudel@fws.gov. Send Friends to www.fws.gov/refuges to look for the latest issues of *Friends Forward* and *Refuge Update* newsletters.

What Makes a Good Web Site?

by K.C. Summers

Every Friends Web site is appropriately different. But some may be more effective than others at providing information and inspiring visitors. Certain features can elevate a site to downright indispensable. Here are a few tips on revving up your site, gleaned from Friends Web editors, industry experts and the toughest critics of all – Web users.

■ **Start with a clean, simple layout.** Avoid cluttering the homepage with lots of gray text. Put boilerplate information (lengthy mission statements, meeting minutes) inside and link to it.

■ **Make photography a priority.** One dominant image can be more effective than five or six smaller ones. Consider the gorgeous cat image on the Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge homepage, www.floridapanther.org, the white-crowned sparrow on the Friends of the Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge site, www.friendsoftualatinrefuge.org, or the striking waterscape on the Friends of the Assabet River NWR site, www.farnwr.org.

The Assabet River site also features a variety of nature shots in a photo gallery, while the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society homepage, www.dingdarlingsociety.org, uses a constantly changing slide show.


■ **Make it easy for visitors.** The “Ding” Darling site has a ticker-style headline alerting viewers to upcoming events. As for making purchases, becoming a member or registering for an event, make it easy by permitting purchases by credit-card link or through PayPal.

■ **Ask for e-mail addresses.** Friends groups that include a place for visitors to sign up to receive more information say it’s an invaluable way to add to their mailing lists and grow membership.

■ **Anticipate questions.** The Friends of the Bosque del Apache NWR, www.friendsofthebosque.org, get frequent phone calls about bird counts, so they make sure to post the weekly numbers for cranes and snow geese on their site. The Friends of Anahuac site, www.friendsofanahuacnwr.org, has a handy photo ID guide to the butterflies

seen on the refuge. The Friends of Ridgefield NWR, www.ridgefieldfriends.org, devote an entire section to their popular BirdFest & Bluegrass event, with everything from a schedule to links to tour guides and vendors.

■ **Encourage visitation.** Provide directions and maps of your town or region and link to the tourism office.

■ **Include little extras.** When a Florida Panther volunteer shot video of a rare daytime sighting of a puma on the refuge, the Friends were quick to post a link to the YouTube video. The **Friends of Blackwater**, www.friendsofblackwater.org, have live cams on both osprey and bald eagle nests; Web users are encouraged to send in photos and questions. The Friends of Ridgefield are adding a downloadable podcast of an interpretive auto tour. These are all ways to provide glimpses of the refuges – and they make for some pretty compelling Web browsing. 

K.C. Summers is a former reporter for The Washington Post.

Resources

Three good guides on Web design and usability for beginners:

■ **“Don’t Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability,”** 2nd edition (New Riders Press), by Steve Krug. A classic in the field, covering everything from wise use of copy to homepage layout.


■ **“The Non-Designer’s Web Book,”** 3rd edition, (Peachpit Press), by Robin Williams and John Tollett. A clearly written, well-illustrated tutorial for aspiring Web designers.

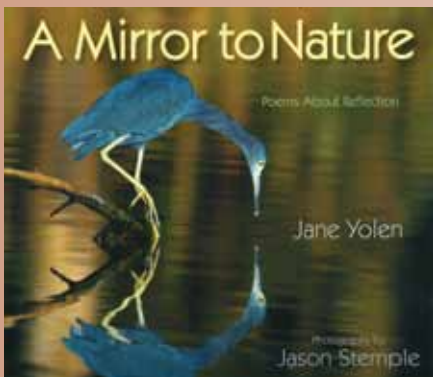
■ **“Learning Web Design: A Beginner’s Guide to HTML, Graphics, and Beyond,”** (O’Reilly Media), by Jennifer Niederst Robbins. All you need to know to create basic Web sites.

The Book Shelf

A Mirror to Nature

by Jane Yolen, photography by Jason Stemple (Wordsong, 2009, All Ages)

"The first mirror was water: puddles, pools, lakes, quiet rivers," writes Jane Yolen to introduce the collection of short poems she has written about wildlife reflected on water. Exquisitely photographed, this slender book includes wood storks, alligator, deer, moorhen, snail, coyote, redfish, snowy egret, raccoon and roseate spoonbill. Perfect to read aloud or to inspire the imagination of young poets or photographers. 




Earth in the Hotseat: Bulletins from a Warming World

by Marfé Ferguson Delano (National Geographic, 2009, Ages 8 and up)




Sled dogs in Greenland resist moving forward on the sea ice because it is melting and the dogs smell salt water: this dramatic photograph opens the book but the author also comes close to home with recommendations to young readers to help fight global warming by eating foods grown locally and shaving eight-minute showers to five minutes. (That last suggestion will save 513 pounds of CO₂ per year.)

Delano explains the history and science of climate change interspersed with "news bulletins," brief interviews with explorers and scientists and lots of "fast facts" – all illustrated with stunning photographs. 

America's National Wildlife Refuges: A Complete Guide

Second Edition by Russell D. Butcher

(Taylor Trade Publishing, 2008, All Ages)

With a foreword by former Refuge Chief Dan Ashe, this new edition of Russell Butcher's *Guide* provides information on every national wildlife refuge, even those closed to the public. In addition to contact information and recreational opportunities, there are descriptive details – landscape, flora and fauna, history. Readers glancing through its 400+ pages will be struck by the breadth and diversity of the National Wildlife Refuge System and perhaps chance upon a refuge they'd like to visit or a fascinating fact they never knew before. The *Guide* includes an appreciative history of the Refuge System by Lynn Greenwalt, former director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 

Strategic Habitat Conservation—Continued from page 1

■ **Biological Planning:** Identify the most important species and establish species population objectives.

■ **Conservation Design:** Develop models to predict the outcome of a conservation effort, understanding that not everything can be anticipated.

■ **Conservation Delivery:** Implement on-the-ground conservation actions, which often require extensive use of partnerships and collaboration.

■ **Monitoring and Research:** Check to see if objectives have been achieved.

Success will be achieved through cooperation among various Service

divisions as well as interagency partnerships.


Migratory Bird Habitat

Strategic Habitat Conservation is not just an abstract theory. Consider the teams of research scientists and land managers from the Service and U.S. Geological Survey that are monitoring migratory bird habitat. One team is looking at food and rest requirements and developing flyway-wide models that simulate birds' movements under a variety of conditions, including climate change and other human disturbances.

Another team is looking at how far apart stopover sites should be. The third team

is considering how individual sites should be managed to provide the best quality habitat possible.

By coordinating their work, these teams will provide managers with precise information on the resources available to migrating birds and identify where the gaps in migration habitat exist. Managers will gain a broader understanding of the importance and needs of individual locations within and among flyways as environmental conditions change from year to year.

The ultimate winners are the birds – and the mission of biodiversity. 

Q&A *send us your questions*

Q: What makes a good grant application?

A: As countless nonprofit organizations can attest, grant writing is a real art form. Of special interest to Friends groups is the National Wildlife Refuge Friends Grant Program, a collaborative among the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, National Wildlife Refuge Association and National Audubon Society. Proposals are evaluated on the applicant's ability to show how the group will organize and implement the proposed project, so it's important to take the time to fill out the application thoroughly and completely.

Key questions to consider when filling out your application:

- What specific organizational need does your project address? Why is your project important?
- How will your project directly benefit fish, wildlife, plant and habitat resources at your refuge?
- How will your project help strengthen your group and its relationship with the refuge and your community?
- How will you involve your membership?


"One key piece of advice that bears repeating is to be specific," says Trevor Needham, Refuge System Friends coordinator, who regularly reviews such grant applications. "The most common mistake applicants make," he says, "is to write in sweeping generalizations with few specifics."

Example: Say you want to hire a contractor to develop an environmental education program on your refuge. That's good, but vague—and not very competitive. Instead, Needham says, try to spell out exactly what the need is, and describe how your proposed project would help the refuge and the surrounding community.

For example, you might say that there are three teachers in your community who want to take an active role in the Friends organization and have come up with a specific educational immersion program two days a week throughout the summer months. Now you're talking.

Pay special attention to the methodology section of the application, Needham advises—the nuts-and-bolts of how you intend to accomplish your goal. It's one thing to come up with objectives, goals and abstracts, but it's critically important to explain how you intend to get from Point A to Point B.

Needham's final piece of advice: Reach out to your grant contact, who can provide guidance.

For more information on Friends grants, including contact information and step-by-step instructions on filling out an application, go to www.nfwf.org. Search for "Friends group grant program." 

From the Chief *—Continued from page 1*

down. At the same time, Facebook reaches a whopping 66 million people. The move to electronic media is one reason we have included a short article in this issue about what makes a great Web site.

If you're like me, you're not ready to give up the daily newspaper. But if you're like me, you want to reach as many people – in as many age categories – as we can about national wildlife refuges. Friends not only have credibility to make editorial writers take notice, but you also have the "social media" access that can transform Friends groups into Facebook or Twitter stars. Many Friends organizations already have a Facebook page.

Don't forget about your local daily and weekly newspapers. Don't ignore traditional media. But do join the scores of Refuge Friends groups that have learned about other means of communicating with a generation that grew up when "google" became a verb. Twitter. Become LinkedIn. Put your refuge photos on Flickr. Speak the language of "new media," and talk to a generation whose newspaper experience has always been online. And let me know how it all works out.

FriendsForward

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*This newsletter is printed on
recycled paper using soy-based inks.*

